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I Believe...

That God Alone Is Immortal

and That This Gift Will Be
Bestowed Upon the Righteous
at the Second Coming of Christ

By STEVEN P. VITRANO

CONFUSED, frustrated, and scandalized by death, man has always cherished thoughts of immortality. It has been the dream of poets and philosophers for centuries.

For the Christian, however, immortality is no idle dream, no whim of fancy or imagination. What he believes about immortality is clearly set forth in Scripture.

Immortality—Life Without Death

To begin with, the Scriptures teach that immortality is life without death—not subject to death. This definition is inherent in the Greek word *athanasia* that the apostle Paul used when writing of immortality. The Greek word for death is *thanatos*. The antonym or opposite word for death is formed by adding the prefix *a*, hence the word *athanasia*. We thus have a rather clear understanding of what Paul had in mind when he wrote of the “Lord of lords; who only hath immortality” (1 Tim. 6:15, 16).

Interestingly enough, there is only one other place in the entire Bible where this word *athanasia* is used and that is in 1 Corinthians 15, where Paul wrote concerning the resurrection and redemption of man. From these two passages the following is clear:

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When Paul made the statement that only God has immortality, he used the Greek language but did not share the Greek concept of the nature of God and man. For the Greeks, man possessed an immortal soul. It was inherently a part of him but only a part. When man died the body perished but the soul did not—it could not, they believed.

But this is not the Biblical concept of the nature of man. In Genesis 2:7 it says that God “formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.” Man *became* a living soul. The soul was not placed within man. The *soul* was the man. It does not say here, nor does it say anywhere in the Bible, that man possesses inherent immortality or has an immortal soul. Quite the contrary. Genesis 2:17 says, “In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die,” and Ezekiel 18:20 declares, “The soul that sinneth, it shall die.”

In the New Testament, Jesus refers to death as a sleep. Upon two different occasions—the first when He raised the daughter of Jairus and the second when He called His dear friend Lazarus from the tomb—Jesus spoke of their condition in death as a sleep. In neither instance is there the slightest hint that either Jairus’ daughter or Lazarus were conscious of what was taking place; no suggestion that an immortal soul

somewhere was not really asleep. In fact, there are only two points at which the analogy of death as a sleep can be established. In sleep, as in death, the person is (1) unconscious and (2) may be made conscious again, either by awaking from sleep or by awaking from death through the resurrecting power of Christ. In other respects there are real differences between sleep and death. For instance, in sleep the heart still beats; in death it is stilled. In sleep the blood still circulates; in death it does not. In sleep the person still breathes; in death he does not.

No Secret

It is no secret where the immortal-soul-of-man idea came from. The record is clear.

When Satan first sought to deceive Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, he contradicted the explicit statement of God. In so doing he was the first to give expression to this lie concerning the nature of man. While God had said, “Thou shalt surely die,” Satan said, “Ye shall not surely die” (Gen. 2:17; 3:4). Unfortunately, this falsehood has persisted in practically every non-Judaic and non-Christian religion ever since. What is even more tragic, it infiltrated and corrupted the teaching of the early Christian church and found its way into many Christian credal and dogmatic pronouncements.

This is not to say that all great Christian thinkers and churchmen have believed in and taught the inherent immortality of the human soul, for this is not the case.

Martin Luther once wrote:

Thus after death the soul goes to its bed-chamber and to its peace, and while it is sleeping it does not realize its sleep, and God preserves indeed the awakening soul. God is able to make Elijah, Moses, and others, and so control them, so that they will live. But how can that be? That we do not know; we satisfy ourselves with the example of bodily sleep, and with what God says: it is a sleep, a rest, and a peace.¹

William Tyndale, English reformer and translator of the Bible, took issue with those who taught the false doctrine of the immortality of the soul:

The true faith putteth [sets forth] the resurrection, which we be warned to look for every hour. The heathen philosophers, denying that, did put [set forth] that the souls did ever live. And the pope joineth the spiritual doctrine of Christ and the fleshly doctrine of philosophers together; things so contrary that they cannot agree.²

In his book *Eternal Hope*, Emil Brunner, contemporary scholar and theologian, wrote:

For the history of Western thought, the Platonic teaching of the immortality of the soul became of special significance. It penetrated so deeply into the thought of Western man because, although with certain modifications, it was assimilated by Christian theology and church teaching, was even declared by the Lateran Council of 1512 [1513] to be a dogma. . . . Only recently, as a result of a deepened understanding of the New Testament, have strong doubts arisen as to its compatibility with the Christian conception of the relation between God and man, and its essentially pre-Christian origin has been ever more emphasized.³

Another theologian of our time, Oscar Cullman, has written in *Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead?*:

If we were to ask an ordinary Christian today . . . what he conceived to be the New

Testament teaching concerning the fate of man after death, with few exceptions we should get the answer: "The immortality of the soul." Yet this widely-accepted idea is one of the greatest misunderstandings of Christianity. . . . The concept of death and resurrection is anchored in the Christ-event, . . . and hence is incompatible with the Greek belief in immortality.⁴

It is indeed to be regretted, however, that for most Christians, in spite of the evidence to the contrary, immortality belongs to man now by virtue of the fact that he possesses a "soul" which does not die. What is so frightful about this is that it opens the door to Satanic delusion through spiritualism and the occult.

The truth is—only God has immortality.

But this is not all that is said in

Scripture about immortality. In the other passage where Paul used the word *athanasia* he tells us of that wondrous day when the people of God will "put on" immortality. "Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory" (1 Cor. 15:51-54).



Let's Talk About **HEALTH**

By **Ralph F. Waddell, M.D.**

IF YOU'RE OVERWEIGHT Overweight, downright obesity, is the Western world's number one health problem today. If you weigh 10 per cent more than the acceptable standard for your sex, height, and frame, you are overweight. If you tip the scales 20 per cent or more than normal you are obese. "Obese" isn't a complimentary term to apply; no one wants to be a "fatty."

Recent studies have shown that one half of all men in their thirties are overweight and that three out of five men in their fifties weigh at least 10 per cent more than they should. Ladies showed up a bit better in that only 40 per cent of those in their thirties exceeded 10 per cent above standard. Their advantage didn't last, for by the time they got into their sixties it was found 60 per cent of them were actually obese.

It is not unusual to hear a rotund person say, "Oh yes, I know I'm too heavy, but I can't help it; I was born to be fat, my whole family is heavy, and so I'm heavy too." Dr. Mayer, of Harvard, has pointed out that if neither of one's parents is obese the individual has only an 8 per cent chance of becoming obese. If one parent is obese the offspring has a 40 per cent chance of becoming obese, and if both parents are obese the chances increase to 80 per cent. Just how much of this tendency to obesity is due to heredity and the genes that go into creating the child, and how much is due to the family's eating pat-

tern is debatable, but the eating pattern factor is probably the more significant.

There was a time when it was generally thought that all fat people were gluttons. It has been shown that such is not necessarily true. With some persons food taken even in small amounts turns to ugly fat.

Others can eat like starved soldiers and stay slim, much to the dismay of chubby friends who gain on even the meagerest of rations. Scientific investigators have confirmed this phenomenon and have uncovered several reasons for it. Carbohydrate, fat, liver, and thyroid metabolism play important roles in the utilization of food. Enzyme systems and the way they operate may mean the difference between being fat and lean.

Fluid retention may be a problem. Not infrequently water accounts for much of one's obesity. In burning ten pounds of fat the human body yields more than 11 pounds of water as a by-product. Kidney function should handle this satisfactorily, but if there is a tendency to retain fluids a person may actually gain weight while on a starvation regimen.

Some people lack the ability to burn carbohydrates satisfactorily. The result is that they store what they eat as fat. This problem may require careful and painstaking professional investigation. However, the chances are, if a person is overweight he is eating more than he needs and is storing the excess as unwanted fat.

Being overweight and being obese

are not the same. A football player may be overweight but not obese; his extra poundage is muscle. An office worker may have the same height and frame, and weigh the same, but still be obese—lots of fat and minimal muscle.

Statistics show that one weighing 20 per cent or more above normal standards can expect to have four years stripped from his life. A person who is 20 per cent above his desirable weight has a 50 per cent greater chance of dying from a stroke than he would have were he of normal weight, a 75 per cent chance of succumbing to nephritis, and a 133 per cent greater chance of dying from diabetes and its complications. It just doesn't pay to be fat.

Other physical impairments such as hypertension, kidney problems, or nervous disorders added to a 20 per cent or more overweight situation, increase the chances of an early death by another 15 to 60 per cent. Pneumonia, influenza, diseases of the gastrointestinal tract, accidents, and cancer are more likely to occur in persons who are overweight.

Studies reported by Dublin and Marks indicate that overweight men who successfully reduced to normal weights and continued at that level enjoyed good health and longevity equal with their normal-weight counterparts.

Reducing can be fun. Crash programs, extreme diets, and tasteless food are not necessary. The ideal reducing regimen consists of a normal diet, made up of fruits, vegetables, and other items enjoyed by the entire family. Eat a little less than you actually need and watch the pounds roll off. With one less slice of bread a day you may lose ten pounds in a year. Maintain a well-balanced diet including all the essential nutrients—just eat less and enjoy it.